

and was seen by upper-class residents as a less-than-desirable place to be.⁴⁸



Wilmington business district about 1870
Image Courtesy of the North Carolina Collection,
UNC-CH

As Reconstruction gave way to the booming 1880s, this group of workers prospered along with the city. Fueling their growth was the Wilmington Cotton Mills. Opened in 1874, the textile mill was in the southern end of town and employed most of the workers in that section.⁴⁹ Following a

⁴⁸ The location of Dry Pond was discussed by resident Henry B. McKoy as being a moving line because others in Wilmington viewed Dry Pond as being near Sixth and Castle, his father recalled that the area was south of Ann and West of Third in the 1860s and, during McKoy's childhood, it was beyond Castle. McKoy's sister, Elizabeth McKoy, wrote that the area known as Dry Pond was a moving target since it became known as a marginalized area of development that moved southward as the city grew. Both of these descriptions indicate that Dry Pond was more of a socio-economic label than a geographic one. Henry B. McKoy, *Wilmington, Do You Remember When?* (Henry B. McKoy: Greenville, South Carolina, 1957), 19-20; Elizabeth F. McKoy, *Early Wilmington Block by Block* (Edwards & Broughton: Raleigh, North Carolina, 1967), 127-128.

⁴⁹ The 1884 Sanborn Map of Wilmington indicates the 125 hands were employed by the Mills at the time the map was drawn. Howell, *Book of Wilmington*, 158.

statewide trend, wages for working-class residents of Wilmington dropped substantially by the 1880 census, reflecting changes in the county's size and reduction in the importance of naval stores, but remained well above the state average.⁵⁰

Once Wilmington fell to Union occupation in 1865, newly freed blacks filtered into the city. A northern journalist wrote that the "native Negroes of Wilmington . . . are doing well. They are of a much higher order of intelligence than those from the country; are generally in comfortable circumstances, and already find time to look into politics. They have a Union League formed among themselves, the object of which is to stimulate industry and education, and to secure combined effort for suffrage, without which they will soon be practically enslaved again."⁵¹ Many of Wilmington's native freedmen remained and became important in the city's economic, cultural, and political development. The leading African American owned businesses were those of artisans who were free blacks or slaves in the city before the war. These men had knowledge of financial matters, working relationships with many of the most powerful whites, and were instilled with a desire to improve their lot for future generations.⁵²

⁵⁰ New Hanover was divided to create Pender County in 1875, leaving only the southern third of the county intact. The section that created Pender was predominantly rural and agricultural in nature with additional income provided by the naval stores industry. Historical Census Browser Retrieved 1/5/2005, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center; Evans, *Ballots and Fence Rails*, 167.

⁵¹ Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Tour of the Southern States, 1865-1866* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965, originally published in 1866) as quoted in Bishir, *Bellamy Mansion*, 47.

⁵² For more on the connections between freedmen and slave artisan entrepreneurship before and after the Civil War, see Robert Kenzer, *Enterprising*